

Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about centenary celebrations



Putonghua pronunciation: *ren2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yan4*

Meanings: person, man, humanity

Pictogram 人 shows human trunk and two legs: 人民 (*ren2 min2* = people~population), 人類 (*ren2 lei4* = man~kind), 人生 (*ren2 sheng1* = human-life = life).

做人難 (*zuo4 ren2 nan2* = doing/being~person~difficult) = Living your life among others is difficult/challenging. 惡人 (*e4 ren2* = fierce/vicious~people), 壞人 (*huai4 ren2* = bad~people) exploit 蠢人 (*chun3 ren2* = stupid~people), 好人 (*hao3 ren2* = good~people). 偉人 (*wei3 ren2* = great~people), 聖人 (*sheng4 ren2* = saintly~people) are rare.

Educationists say 十年樹木, 百年樹人 (*shi2 nian2 shu4 mu4, bai3 nian2 shu4 ren2* = ten~years~erect~tree, hundred~years~erect~people = growing trees takes a decade, nurturing people takes a century), i.e. fostering 人才 (*ren2 cai2* = human~talent = talented/useful people) requires time/dedication.

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